

Conservation news

IUCN Red List Training and Assessment Workshop for Africa's bats, Namibia


In September 2023, an IUCN Red List Training and Assessment Workshop for Africa's bats was held in Swakopmund, Namibia. Bats without Borders, Bat Conservation Africa, the IUCN Red List Authority, IUCN Species Survival Commission Bat Specialist Group, Global Union of Bat Diversity Networks, Lube Bat Conservancy and University of Namibia brought together 28 participants and trainers, of whom 20 were from nine African countries; 15 were early-career or in a graduate programme. Funding was provided by The Rufford Foundation, Woodtiger Fund, Greater Houston Community Foundation, Oppenheimer Generations-Research and Conservation, National Science Foundation and individually leveraged funds.

The workshop had four objectives: to establish an expanded network of trained experts to keep Red List assessments of Africa's bats up to date, for regional teams to work on assessments during the training and future additional assessments, to launch regional collaborations to draft bat conservation and research programmes, and to develop strategies for integration of bats into the Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) initiative.

All participants were trained as Red List assessors and another 15 have subsequently been recruited. During the workshop, 26 Red List assessments were started, focusing on species that had not previously been assessed because they were new to science or their status had changed following taxonomic revisions.

Teams are being established to develop and advance regional bat conservation and research plans. As bats were not considered in the establishment of most KBAs, in 2022 the Global Union of Bat Diversity Networks established a group to ensure bats are considered as trigger species in existing KBAs and could be used help establish new KBAs (two or more range restricted species need to be present, with at least 1% of their range at a site to trigger KBA status). Following this workshop and KBA training at a Rufford Learning Event organized and led by Rachael Cooper-Bohannon in Otjiwarongo, Namibia in September 2023, a multifaceted approach will ensure bats are considered within the global KBA initiative. For example, in Kenya a national gap analysis should dramatically change how bats are represented in Kenya's KBAs. Initial analyses show that none of the current bat trigger species in existing KBAs will be recognized by the new global KBA standard established in 2016. There are several KBAs where bats will be recognized as a trigger and at least one new KBA will be proposed for the Vulnerable *Otomops harrisoni* at Mount Suswa.

Twenty-six participants presented work at the 14th African Small Mammal Symposium after the workshop. This workshop successfully engaged the next generation of bat conservationists and researchers and showed them that they do not work alone—people from across Africa and globally are there to support, encourage and mentor them.

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The Dam Removal Europe movement reaches Romania

Thanks to the partnership between Fauna & Flora and the World Fish Migration Foundation, the Dam Removal Europe movement has reached Romania. A major international conference—Our Waters—Restoring the Longitudinal Connectivity of Romanian Rivers—took place on 8 November 2023 in Bucharest. The conference brought together more than 80 specialists and representatives of relevant institutions and civil society from 11 countries and from a range of institutions in the host country (the National Administration of Romanian Waters, National Agency for Environmental Protection, National Agency for Protected Areas, National Environmental Guard, research institutes, universities and other institutions). Several environmental NGOs, such as the Alex Găvan Foundation, WWF and Aquacrisius, were also represented, as well as private engineering companies.

Speakers, both Romanian and international, made technical and biodiversity conservation arguments in favour of removing dams and obsolete weirs, which block the longitudinal connectivity of rivers, hindering sediment and nutrient movement and fish migration. Of note were presentations by engineers from Inter-Fluve demonstrating the benefits of the removal of barriers from rivers. On 9 November there was a field trip to the habitat of the Critically Endangered asprete or sculpin perch *Romanichthys valsanicola*, which is fragmented by several barriers.